

Half a Millennium: Landmarks of Higher Education in the Americas

It is generally considered that the University as an independent institution dedicated to non-religious education and research began in 1088 in Bologna, Italy¹. Since their beginnings, Universities have been at the forefront of scientific and technological knowledge. They have also been a stage for society's struggle between change and status quo, progress and tradition. This "profile" highlights two moments in the history of Universities on the American continent. The first vignette describes the commencement ceremony for a new doctor at the University of San Marcos in Lima, Peru, during the 1600's. During that period, knowledge was deemed a monopoly of the Universities and generally bestowed upon members of the social and economic elites, as reflected in the pomp that surrounds the ceremony. The second vignette portrays the Chautauqua society in the late 1800's and early 1900's in the United States, a pioneer movement intent upon the democratization of higher education. The third vignette describes the use of information and communication technology in Mexico to expand access to higher education beyond the campus walls.

Pomp and Circumstance in Colonial America² - During the Colonial period in the Americas, Lima, the Capital of the Viceroyalty of Peru, was one of the richest cities in the New World, controlling the silver trade from the Andean region to Spain. One of the initial presents of the Spanish Crown to the Viceroyalty was the University of San Marcos, founded in May 12, 1551. Antonio Espinoza, who visited the region in the early 1600, left us a description of the ceremony surrounding the commencement of a new doctor into the University's rolls:



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"The University's faculty is important, for it comprises more than 80 Doctors and Masters. The members of the Circuit Court join them, for at the end of the year the fees amount to many ducats. The lecture halls in the schools are excellent, and the chapel very fine, but the most remarkable feature is the amphitheater, where they hold the public functions and commencements. The amphitheater is very large and im-

posing and the display at the granting of whatever degrees are given is also imposing. (For the granting of degrees) they invite the city's nobility as an escort, and meet at the house of the Doctor-to-be in a blare of trumpets, flageolets, and bugles, with a banner which hangs from a window of the house over a canopy on crimson velvet cushions and has the arms of the University and of the graduating Doctor. These arms are likewise set up in the theater erected in the Cathedral under the royal arms; they remind and notify the invited guests and doctors, who form an escort the evening before. The nobility follow the banner, then the Beadles with their silver maces, then the Masters and Doctors with their insignia, in order of age, closing with the Dean of the faculty and the graduating Doctor. In this order they repair to the Rector's house, where the members of the Circuit Court await them. With the Rector in their center, they continue in the procession, in order of age. And in this same order the following day they parade till they arrive at the Cathedral, where the theater and the stage have been decorated and provided with seats. Mass is said for them, and at its close after leaving the Cathedral, the newest Doctor of the faculty delivers his burlesque invective, and the Chancellor gives him his degree, just as is done at Salamanca."

Trains, Cars and a New Access to Education³ - From the very beginning, the North American colonies were characterized by a rebellious spirit and a desire for democratic participation. The Chautauqua Society reflected these characteristics. The Society was a private enterprise founded by a clergyman and a businessman as a summer school to prepare Sunday school teachers. The first of these schools met on the shore of Lake Chautauqua, New York, in 1874, and mixed instruction on academic subjects with religious topics and recreation. The public interest was so intense that four years later, Chautauqua evolved into a correspondence school, the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle (CLSC). The school was initially composed of a four-year reading course in the humanities, sciences, theology, and

social studies. After passing final exams, students received a college degree that was accepted as a basis for entry into graduate courses in many traditional universities. Besides the printed materials that the students used at home, they were required to attend the summer meetings, where they were lectured by some of the most important scholars of the day.



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As the correspondence school began to attract students throughout the country, travel to the summer meetings in New York became difficult. Many cities decided to develop their own summer assemblies, such as the Clear Lake Camp Meeting and Assembly Chautauqua, in Iowa. Entrepreneurs also developed a system of mobile Chautauquas, or a Chautauqua Circuit. These were train or car caravans that visited smaller towns during the summer and offered a mix of classes, plays, operas and recitals, together with athletic events and entertainment. Similar to a circus, the Chautauqua Circuit paraded through town to its grounds, where a large tent was erected. Families would come from far away and camp at the site to attend the events. From the presentation of "Il Trovatore" to lessons in science, the traveling tour had something of interest for everybody, young and old, men and women alike. Children had their own special program called "junior Chautauqua." The meetings offered the presence of famous opera stars, talented artists and renowned scholars, some trying to make extra money during the summer, others coming for pure idealism. Warren G. Harding, who would become president of the United States, was a popular Chautauqua speaker. In 1920 and 1921, Chautauqua companies operated 93 circuits in the United States and Canada. The decline of Chautauqua is attributed to a mix of dwindling quality, the introduction of the radio and the change of culture of American towns. Its deathblow came with the Great Depression of 1929.

Removing Barriers with Information and Communication Technologies⁴ - Mexico's tradition with distance and open

education is almost fifty years old. It started in 1948 with a government experiment to provide training for public school teachers without disrupting their regular work schedule. Currently, every institution of higher education and a growing number of schools, from Kindergarten to 12th grade, are equipped with Internet services. The government provides the infrastructure and support via the Educational Data Processing Network and the Educational Satellite Television Network. The Data Processing Network is a computerized system based on the Internet that provides support and information to teachers and students across the nation. The Network is connected to over 1,000 elementary and secondary schools. The Satellite Network is a closed-circuit system with six television and 24 audio channels that broadcast all over Mexico, southern United States, Central America, and parts of South America. The system reaches over 10,000 primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions with a total of 20,000 receivers. Its programs range from parenting skills to complex scientific courses. In addition, the National Educational Video Library provides easily accessible information to educational institutions across the Nation.

More than 20 Mexican institutions offer distance education at the tertiary level, eight of them operating on a national or regional basis. The two most famous are the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and the Virtual University of the Technological Institute of Monterrey (See article in this Issue). Adding to that Teleprimaria, Telesecundaria (See article in TechKnowLogia, September/October 1999) and other initiatives to bring open and distance education to populations of all ages across Mexico, the country is at the forefront of the use of information and communication technology in education.

1. A brief history of the Università di Bologna can be found at the University's Web Page, www.unibo.it/avl/storia

2. Adapted from Espinosa, Antonio Vasquez de. *Compendio y Descripción de las Indias Occidentales*, circa 1620. Translation by Charles Upson Clark, 1948, pp. 445-46. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collection #108.

3. Ingalls, C. (Albany Democrat-Herald), *Chautauqua* at <http://www.gtconnect.com/celebrate2000/Focus/leisure-culture-01.html>; McCown, R., *Records of Redpath Chautauqua* at <http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/spec-coll/Bai/inventory/article.html>.

4. Ortiz, V.G. (1999). Open and Distance Education Programmes in Latin America, Chapter 5. In Farrell, G.M. (Editor). *The Development of Virtual Education: A Global Perspective*. The report can be found at The Commonwealth of Learning home page: <http://www.col.org>. More information on the University of West Indies can be found at <http://www.uwichill.edu.bb/bnccde>